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PRESS RELEASE

USAID Supports the Development of Active Labor Market Policies in Macedonia

On November 24, the USAID Business Environment Activity (BEA) with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy held a conference on *Employment Policies and Measures*. The conference opened a dialogue between the social partners – government, employers and the trade unions – on the challenge of decreasing the number of unemployed people in the country through implementation of an extensive active labor market program. To provide for better performance of the government plan in the area of the labor market policy reform, the conference brought regional experts to present their countries' experiences.

The conference was opened by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Xhelal Bajrami. "We expect that after this conference we will jointly continue to create and implement employment policies that will be in line with those of the EU. They will be policies for increasing employment, quality of labor and productivity, based on improved social cohesion", he said.

"In transitional economies, the labor market has to adjust and labor policies need to encourage labor mobility and entrepreneurship" said Michael Fritz, USAID Macedonia Mission Director. "Through USAID's Business Environment activity, we work with our counterparts to reduce barriers to labor mobility by promoting flexible forms of labor relations and agreements"

Topics covered by the conference included current labor market policies in the Republic of Macedonia, programs for active labor market measures in 2008, the new services on the Macedonian labor market, as well as the impact of the active labor market programs in Bulgaria and Croatia. The conference was attended by the government representatives responsible for policies that directly influence employment, organizations of employers, trade unions, academic career centers, and cooperate with the donor community in Macedonia.

USAID Business Environment Activity (BEA) has worked with all social partners to gain awareness about the need of implementation of international labor standards, which enhance the overall labor market performance. USAID sees this conference as a platform for exchanging views about the ways in which Macedonian Government can create jobs, improve skills and ultimately boost economic growth.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The American people, through USAID, have invested nearly \$500 million in Macedonia since 1993. USAID is implementing projects that create jobs, reduce corruption, and prepare Macedonian students for the workforce. These initiatives improve the quality of life and support Macedonia's transition to a stable and prosperous democracy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>